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Govt okays troop deployment for by-polls

• Approval follows requests from ECP for tomorrow's elections in 13 NA, provincial constituencies • Security personnel authorised to act as magistrates for offences

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: The interior ministry on Friday approved the deployment of the Pakistan Army and civil armed forces for security in 13 national and provincial assembly constituencies, where by-elections are scheduled to take place on Sunday (tomorrow).

A notification issued by the interior ministry, a copy of which is available with *Dawn*, said the approval followed requests from Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

The civil armed forces will be deployed as "2nd-tier responders (standby/quick reaction)", while the troops of Pakistan Army will be deployed as "3rd-tier responders (quick reaction force)" from Friday to Nov 24 (Monday).

The civil armed forces will be deployed as "second-tier responders (standby/quick reaction)," whereas the troops of the Pakistan Army will serve as "third-tier responders (quick reaction force)" from Friday through Nov 24 (Monday).

The exact numbers will be determined by home departments and the ECP based on ground assessments.

The constituencies where the by-elections are taking place include NA-18 Haripur, NA-96 Faisalabad-II, NA-104 Faisalabad-X, NA-143 Sahiwal-III, NA-185 D.G Khan-II, NA-129 Lahore-XIII, PP-73 Sargodha-III, PP-98 Faisalabad-I, PP-115 Faisalabad-XVIII, PP-116 Faisalabad-XIX, PP-203 Sahiwal-VI, PP-269 Muzaffargarh-II, and PP-87 Mianwali-III.

ECP notification

A separate notification issued by the ECP stated that, under Article 218(3) of the Constitution, the commission was responsible for organising and conducting elections and ensuring that they were held honestly, fairly, and in accordance with the law, with safeguards against corrupt practices.

"The ECP, in exercise of its power under Article 220 of the Constitution and all other powers enabling it in that behalf, has requisitioned the services of Pakistan armed forces/civil armed forces in terms of Article 245 of the Constitution," it read.

"The forces so deployed are empowered to exercise powers under section 4 and 5 of the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997, for the duration of their deployment … in aid of civil power subject to law enforced in Pakistan," it added.

The statement continued that the ECP under Article 220 of the Constitution — read with Section 5 and Section 193 of the Elections Act, 2017 (XXIII of 2017) — has also authorised each designated officer in charge of Pakistan armed forces and civil armed forces as well as junior commissioned officer, to exercise the powers of a magistrate first class during their deployment for security.

They may take cognisance of offences under sections 176, 177, 183 and 194 of the Elections Act and conduct summary trials under Section 190 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

Despite truce, Israeli forces kill eight Palestinians

• Two teenagers killed in occupied West Bank, five others in southern Gaza Strip • Israeli military admits to killing 13 Palestinians in a Lebanon refugee camp

JERUSALEM: Israeli occupation forces killed at least eight Palestinians on Friday, including two teenagers who were shot dead in the occupied West Bank, while the Israeli military also confirmed it had killed 13 Palestinians in its Tuesday's strike on a refugee camp in southern Lebanon.

The Palestinian health ministry said that two teenagers were martyred overnight in the town of Kufr Aqab. "The young man Amr Khaled Ahmed Al-Marbou, 18, and the boy Sami Ibrahim Sami Mashayekh, 16, were martyred by occupation forces gunfire in the town of Kufr Aqab near Ramallah," the ministry announced in a statement.

The Palestinian Red Crescent reported that its medics transported two victims from Kufr Aqab during the night, describing one with a "very serious live bullet injury" and the second with a "live bullet injury to the chest."

Oday al-Shurfa, a friend who witnessed the killing of Marbou, told *AFP* that the pair were on the street when Israeli forces opened fire during a raid. He said Israeli soldiers shot them without provocation.

Shurfa stated that Marbou was hit "in the chest, in the heart. He collapsed and was martyred on the spot," insisting his friend was not participating in any clashes or throwing stones.

The town of Kufr Aqab, though technically part of illegally annexed east Jerusalem, is cut off by Israel's separation wall, depriving its residents of basic municipal services from either Jerusalem or the Palestinian Authority.

In the besieged southern Gaza Strip, the Israeli army said its forces killed five Palestinians on Friday. The killings took place in an area of southern Gaza under Israeli military control, east of the so-called Yellow Line.

Israeli military used "immediate threat" to justify the killings. The same pretext has been repeatedly used by the Israeli military to legitimise its brutality, even as Palestinian resistance groups have affirmed a halt to their activities in Gaza since a ceasefire was announced.

Separately, a Gaza hospital official told AFP that another Palestinian was killed by Israeli fire near Khan Yunis.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military confirmed on Friday that its strike on the Ain al-Helweh refugee camp in southern Lebanon earlier in the week killed 13 Palestinians, whom it claimed were "Hamas terrorists." —Agencies

GUNMEN guard an earth mover searching for bodies in Nuseirat refugee camp.—AFP

(CLOCKWISE from top left) A ball of smoke and flame rises after an Indian-made Tejas fighter jet lost altitude and crashed during an aerial display at the Dubai Airshow; people look at the plume of smoke; and, firefighters work at the site of the crash.—Reuters

17 private schools served notices over 'forcing branded supplies'

• Face charges of pushing parents to buy overpriced notebooks, uniforms and workbooks • CCP takes action after complaints of arbitrary fee hikes and non-transparent sales practices

By Kalbe Ali

ISLAMABAD: The Competition Commission of Pakistan (CCP) has issued show-cause notices to 17 major private school systems for allegedly abusing their dominant position by compelling parents to purchase expensive, logo-branded notebooks, workbooks, and uniforms exclusively from school-authorised vendors.

The action has been taken to safeguard millions of school-going children and their families from unfair pricing practices, according to the commission, following a detailed inquiry initiated on the basis of complaints from parents, guardians, and other stakeholders, the CCP said in a statement.

Complainants alleged arbitrary fee hikes, non-transparent selling practices, and the bundling of mandatory branded school supplies, effectively leaving families with no choice but to purchase these items at inflated prices.

The CCP has directed the 17 school systems to submit written responses within 14 days, appear before the commission through duly authorised representatives, and explain why enforcement orders under Section 31 and penalties under Section 38 should not be imposed. The failure to comply may result in ex-parte proceedings. Under the law, the CCP may impose a penalty of up to 10pc of the annual turnover or Rs750 million, whichever is higher, for such violations.

Starting in 2015, the commission investigated private schools for possible anti-competitive fee increases, but progress stalled due to poor cooperation from schools and a court stay that lasted until 2020. New complaints in 2021 about oligopolistic practices and restrictive purchasing requirements prompted the Commission to revive the enquiry, yet repeated resignations, transfers, and lack of quorum caused continual disruptions. After several reconstitutions of the Enquiry Committee, the Commission finally appointed new officers in February 2025 to complete the investigation.

"These school networks operate hundreds of campuses nationwide and collectively educate millions of students, giving them considerable influence over enrolled families," the commission said.

An inquiry by the commission revealed that parents were mandated to buy logo-bearing notebooks, workbooks, uniforms, and other ancillary school products from exclusive school-authorized outlets. In several instances, it found, schools sold compulsory "study packs" through online portals or designated vendors, with students prohibited from using generic notebooks or uniforms from the open market. The provision of education services to enrolled students, where each school enjoyed a 100 per cent market share, making students "captive consumers"; and the market for ancillary school products, which became the "tied market", it added.

According to the commission, private educational institutions account for nearly half of all student enrollment in the country. With inflation already straining household budgets, the imposition of overpriced branded materials further burdens families and raises concerns about excessive commercialisation within the education sector, it said.

Schools' response

When contacted, Waheed Khan, secretary general of Private Schools Association, Islamabad, said: "This topic needs some clarity and we will tell this to the CCP. We give specific address only to facilitate the parents. The books are neither selected nor printed by the schools... most of the books belong to Oxford and Cambridge boards while some are government books."

Indian-made Tejas jet crashes at Dubai Airshow

NEW DELHI: A 'made in India' Tejas fighter jet crashed in a ball of fire during an aerial display at the Dubai Airshow on Friday, killing the pilot in front of horrified spectators.

Following the incident, the Indian Air Force said it was setting up a court of inquiry to investigate the cause.

Video from the site showed black smoke rising behind a fenced airstrip, and Dubai's government shared a photograph of firefighting teams dousing the smouldering wreckage.

This was the second known crash of the single-engine, 4.5-generation fighter jet, which is built by state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. and powered by General Electric engines. The first crash came during an exercise in India in 2024.

"A court of inquiry is being constituted to ascertain the cause of the accident," the Indian Air Force said in a statement, which also confirmed the death of the sole pilot.

Experts stressed it was too early to say what caused the crash. GE said in a statement it was ready to support the investigation.

Jignesh Variya, 46, who was attending the show with his family, told *Reuters* the fighter jet had been flying for no more than eight or nine minutes when it went into a nose-dive. He said it flattened out but continued to lose altitude, crashing at around 2:15pm.

"I could see three different fireballs when it collided with the ground," Variya said. "Everybody in the crowd stood up there on their feet, and then maybe in around 30 seconds, the emergency vehicles rushed over to the location at the crash site."

Flying resumed later on Friday, witnesses said, with jets back in the sky above the show site.

The crash came on the final day of the Middle East's largest aviation event and was the first on record for the Dubai Airshow.—Reuters

Modi heads to G20 as Trump boycotts South Africa summit

By Our Correspondent

NEW DELHI: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seen as avoiding meeting President Donald Trump since the India-Pakistan military standoff and its curious ceasefire in May, was headed for Johannesburg on Thursday after the US president said he was boycotting the summit in South Africa.

The Kolkata-based *Telegraph* said Mr Modi had avoided the last two multilateral platforms where the US president was present — the Asean summit in Malaysia and Trump's Gaza Peace summit in Egypt — "resulting in speculation that the prime minister was trying to avoid a meeting with the American leader till the India-US trade deal is finalised".

Mr Trump has decided to boycott the summit over differences with the host country on the agenda and alleged mistreatment of white people in the Rainbow Nation by the Cyril Ramaphosa government.

The external affairs ministry on Wednesday confirmed Modi's participation in the G20 leaders' summit.

Mr Trump has slammed the host nation's agenda for the November 22-23 summit of promoting solidarity and helping developing nations adapt to worse weather disasters, transition to clean energy and cut their excessive debt costs.

This is the first time a G20 summit is being held in Africa. Mr Trump wants South Africa out of the G20 and all other such groupings, *The Telegraph* said.

Since the G20 is not a grouping created by a treaty, member countries are admitted by consensus and can be removed in the same manner, resulting in Russia remaining in the G20 despite calls for its expulsion over the Ukraine war.

Embarking on his three-day trip, Mr Modi said he will present India's perspective at the forum in line with its vision of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' and 'One Earth, One Family and One Future'.

"Will be attending the G20 summit in Johannesburg, South Africa. This is a particularly special summit as it is being held in Africa. Various global issues will be discussed there. Will be meeting various world leaders during the summit," Mr Modi posted on X.

On the margins of the summit, Mr Modi is expected to hold bilateral meetings with some of the leaders present in Johannesburg.

He is visiting South Africa from November 22-23 at the invitation of President Cyril Ramaphosa to attend the 20th G20 leaders' summit under South Africa's Presidency.

"This will be a particularly special summit given that it would be the first G20 summit being held in Africa. During India's Presidency of the G20 in 2023, the African Union had become a member of the G20," Mr Modi said in his statement.

"During the visit, I also look forward to my interaction with the Indian diaspora in South Africa, which is one of the largest outside India," he added.

Mexico's Fatima Bosch crowned Miss Universe after insult drama

• Event marred by controversy, walkouts and judge resignations • Thailand director publicly singled Bosch out over promotional posts, later apologised

NONTHABURI: Miss Mexico was crowned Miss Universe in Thailand on Friday, strutting to victory after several dramatic missteps before the final round, including staging a walkout when an organiser of the beauty pageant chastised her.

Contestants from Ivory Coast, the Philippines, Thailand and Venezuela also made it to the final stage, selected from more than 120 women vying for the title in a contest considered one of the "big four" of global beauty pageants.

However, chaos reigned before Miss Mexico Fatima Bosch was crowned, from allegations of an insult to her intelligence to judges quitting and participants falling on and off the stage.

Bosch staged a dramatic walkout this month from a meeting where she was lambasted by Miss Universe Thailand director Nawat Itsaragrisil.

Nawat appeared in a livestream of the event to single her out during a dispute over her apparent failure to post promotional content on her social media accounts.

Bosch, flanked by Miss Iraq, walked out of the room after Nawat called for security to intervene.

Others appeared to rise in solidarity with Bosch, before freezing as Nawat warned that those still wanting to participate should "sit down".

"What your director did is not respectful: he called me dumb," Bosch told reporters at the time. "The world needs to see this because we are empowered women and this is a platform for our voice."

The newly crowned winner told a press conference on Friday that she would like to be remembered as "a Miss Universe that wasn't afraid to be herself" and "a person that changed, a little bit, the prototype of what is a Miss Universe".

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum had called Bosch an "example of how we women should speak out" in the face of aggression after the incident with Nawat.

"In public events, I say women look prettier when we speak out," Sheinbaum said.

Nawat later apologised. He initially declined to comment when asked about Bosch on Friday, telling reporters he'd "rather not talk about her".

"It's better to let pageant fans discuss it. I respect the result anyway," he said.

Nawat then congratulated her later in the same news conference.

"I do support, and congratulations again to Mexico's fans," he said.

'Secret' vote

Mexican media and social networks were awash with coverage of Bosch after the incident, heightening anticipation.

In Villahermosa, Bosch's hometown, thousands of people gathered at a baseball stadium to watch the pageant live.

"Mexico, Mexico!" chanted the crowd, which erupted in cheers and applause when she was crowned, while fireworks lit up the sky, according to Mexican media reports.

Other drama in the run-up to the final round included two judges quitting this week, one alleging that the contest was rigged by a "secret and illegitimate vote" held without the official jury.

MISS Mexico Fatima Bosch is surrounded by other contestants as she celebrates winning the Miss Universe title.—AFP

"This vote was conducted by individuals who are not recognised members of the official judging panel," French composer Omar Harfouch wrote in a statement posted on Instagram.

The Miss Universe Organisation has denied Harfouch's claim, saying that "no impromptu jury has been created".

Former professional footballer Claude Makelele also withdrew as a judge, citing "unforeseen personal reasons" in a statement on social media.

Miss Britain Danielle Latimer tripped and fell flat on the stage during the costume round on Wednesday while wearing an outfit inspired by the Cockney character Eliza Doolittle.

And Miss Jamaica Gabrielle Henry was hospitalised after she fell off the main stage during an evening gown showcase, president of the Miss Universe Organisation Raul Rocha said in a statement.

Miss Universe Jamaica public relations director Shannon-Dale Reid told *AFP* on Wednesday that Henry was "resting under medical observation" and had not suffered serious injuries.—AFP

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